Point Board Meeting Minutes

November 27, 1989
By telephone conference

Present on-line: Stewart Brand, Chuck Blitz, Doug Carlston, Bob Fuller, Paul Hawken, Huey Johnson, and Kevin Kelly

The Point Board discussed the bookkeeping procedures of Whole Earth and strongly urged Kevin to change the operations so that the bookkeeper and check-signer were not the same person. The board requested that Kevin be the sole authority for signing checks, and that the bookkeeper of Point not have check-signing privileges in order to prevent possible financial abuses, even though none to date were known. Paul says this was an earlier practice of Point. There was a suggestion that checks over the amount of $1,000 be required to be doublesigned.

The board resolved to elect Richard Ditzler, current Point bookkeeper, as the Treasurer of Point Foundation, and Steffanie Leonard, current director of the Whole Earth Institute, as Secretary of Point.

It was agreed that Chairmanship-of-the-board be rotated among board members. Doug proposed that board meetings be scheduled on a regular basis far in advance. There was general and strong agreement that phone conferencing was awkward and should be avoided if possible.

Doug Carlston reported on the negotiations with NETI, co-owners of the WELL. Point has made an offer to purchase NETI's half for $35,000 in cash, assuming that the WELL would pay a $90,000 obligation to NETI on a fixed monthly payment. Doug said that Mike Wilens of NETI was considering this offer. Doug has offered to loan Point the $35,000 to make the purchase. He would expect repayment with commercial rates of interest.

Kevin tentatively scheduled a goal-setting workshop with Richard Steckel for two days, February 1 and 2, 1990. Paul felt that was vital that board members engage in a whole hearted way, that these kind of workshops do not work with members just popping in and out. Board members all indicated they could come for one day. Consensus was that Feb. 2 would be a better time. Someone suggested that an in-person board meeting could piggyback on the event.

Whole Earth Status Report -- November 1989

This year Whole Earth is doing better than usual financially. At the moment we have about $50,000 cash in the bank. ($20,000 is a long-term loan from Joshua Mailman due to be paid back next year.) Christmas renewals promise to be plentiful due to a strong winter issue ("The Global Teenager"), and a successful mailing to donors for gifts subscriptions. Starting the new year, staff will get a 6% raise (from $12/hour to $12.75). Since there was no raise last year, this works out to be 3%/year -- not much of a raise considering inflation, but I want to be sure we can issue one next year, too.

Fundraising

Fundraising for the Whole Earth Institute is only now beginning to regain some of the momentum lost by the departure of Susan Frank. There was a lull of any useful activity this summer as Susan Frank wavered between two more-than-full-time jobs, and then left for the more glamorous one. Stephanie Leonard began last month to pick up where Sue dropped the ball. She is making calls to candidates on lists supplied by board members. Because of this major disruption it's been difficult to evaluate the potential of a fundraising drive for Whole Earth Institute. To date, we have taken in $6,000 in cash from readers responding to my solicitation in the magazine, but have about $12,000 in expenses for wages and printing costs. We still need the critical seeds of a few individual Founders making a significant contribution. In January 1990 we will decide whether to continue this drive based on results to that date.

WELL News

The WELL continues to prosper in reputation and service. A front-page Wall Street Journal feature ran a verbatim transcript of the WELL's lightening quick "Earthquake" topic which became a remarkable community on-line center during the days following the quake. A recent New York Times profile also indicates how appealing a cultural innovation the WELL is.

At the same time, the WELL continues to expand in membership and capacity. It is running at about 15% growth this year. An unorthodox capitalization program using advance fees from users to buy a bigger

computer went amazingly smooth. Online hours dropped a little intitially, as expected, after the faster machine went up, but by Fall usage had hit another record high. More ports are being added, and another hard disk has been installed. New users continue to enroll at a steady rate.

The WELL is increasing in value daily. Its co-owner NETI is actively seeking a buyer for itself, which means that the other half of the WELL would be sold to an unknown. It is in Point's interest then, and the WELL's too, to buy out NETI's half as soon as possible. The choices are for Point to wholly own the WELL, or to entertain a third party as a new co-owner. Or a sequence from the first to the latter.

Polaroid Snapshot Day

Where does Whole Earth go from here? That's a question that more and more wants to be answered diligently. It needs to be addressed in a serious, dedicated, and whole hearted way. Last spring Stephen Schwartz, a candidate for publisher, stopped by, and asked us some inflammatory questions like "What are Whole Earth's assets?" His questions rang the staff like a bell and they haven't stopped ringing. On a tip from Chuck Blitz, I contacted and met Richard Steckel, a wonderful professional who was willing to work with Point in answering some of those questions in an organized and productive way.

I spent an afternoon with Richard Steckel and was very impressed by his non-trendiness, and his solid understanding of the dynamics of non-profits. He wrote a new and marvelous book called *Filthy Rich and other Non Profit Fantasies* which I'll be sending each of you. Through the generous gift of Joshua Mailman, we'll have Richard Steckel for two days. His workshop (he calls it a Polariod Snapshot) would not only help the staff visualize what Point wants to do next, but would also help the board do this as well. With Mr. Steckel's help I hope we can do what I have not been successful doing so far: to engage our extraordinarily creative board in taking Point onto the Next Thing, instead of struggling to patch up a sinking boat. I feel Point is afloat, if not adrift.

It would be a tremendous opportunity if Point board members participated in this project. I have tentatively scheduled the workshop for Weds. & Thurs., February 1-2, 1990. We will reschedule around board member's calendars to maximize your

input. Even a few hours together would be of great benefit to this process. My own sense of the foundation (Point) is that at this moment, 20 years into its life, a short while spent with current board members taking stock and crystalizing some goals with the staff would be the best thing we could do.

Publisher Wanted

To help Whole Earth/Point re-orient itself I will be taking a sabbatical from the magazine starting in August 1990. The major things this will accomplish are: to bring in a badly needed publisher to take on some of what I do and much of what I should be doing but don't get too; to rejuvenate our network of contributors through a new editor with new ideas; to build up the bench -- right now there is no second string in editorial; and to give me a chance to get out of the office and snoop around. This will be an unpaid sabbatical. What will I do? Hang around, try some off-the-wall things, get away from the firing line for a while, do something I haven't done many times before (I will have overseen more than one third of CQ/WER's issues), and follow up on some of the ideas that storm through here, probably bringing back better stories than I could ever get sitting here at my desk.

My major concerns for such a move are: maintaining continuity in the magazine and the institution; and finding the right person to perform as publisher. (Short ad for this job: Needs ease with figures, business sense, appreciation of magazine's ideas, managerial skills. Long hours, low pay, great license.) One of the greatest contributions a board member could make at this juncture would be to send my way an ideal publisher for *Whole Earth Review*.

Beside a publisher, Point also needs some officers, and perhaps another board member. We are without a chairman of the board, a treasurer, or secratary. (I suggest that our bookkeeper Richard Ditzler be voted the treasurer so that he can sign forms for Point.)

On the following page is a suggested agenda for our teleconference meeting.

-- Kevin Kelly